

First Call's Weekly Announcements – June 4, 2010

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We encourage you to forward and share the Weekly Announcements with your networks. If circulating excerpts from the Weekly Announcements, please acknowledge First Call as the source of the information.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and any research or event information you wish to have shared with the First Call network. Please let us know what's going on in your community so we can help spread the word!

Please visit our web site at www.firstcallbc.org for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, events, new publications and more.

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Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. Report from Provincial Child and Youth Committee Meeting on Child Poverty

On May 21, a delegation from First Call and several other witnesses presented to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth at an all day meeting on child poverty. Other presenters included Dr. Evan Adams, who is the provincial Aboriginal health physician advisor, and representatives from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Human Early Learning Partnership, BC Healthy Living Alliance, Dr. Michael Prince and Dr. Carol Matusicky. The meeting was held in response to a request from the Representative for Children and Youth that the committee take the lead in producing a child poverty plan. Here are some excerpts from First Call's presentation.

Julie Norton:

For over a decade we have been publishing the Child Poverty Report Card... Child and youth poverty is a significant issue. Children are only young once. That's it. It's a limited-time offer, and we have to take that seriously. Tomorrow or ten years from now. [...] The issues that we're seeing with children now are critical issues. [...]

That requires a political commitment. It doesn't always require more money. Unfortunately, that's what is seen. You know, when we talk about poverty, people get uncomfortable, quite frankly. They don't want to hear about that, because automatically it's assumed that: "Oh, if we're talking about poverty, we need more money."

We have raised this issue with our government, as citizens of British Columbia. I take that very seriously. I am a citizen of this province. When I'm dismissed about issues that are important, that hurts. [...]

What we want from First Call is a poverty reduction plan that covers the province, includes targets and outcomes as well as regular, systematic reporting to the public. It is no more than what is asked of publicly funded non-profits. We do this, and so we ask the same of our government as a publicly funded non-profit, so to speak.

Eliminating poverty is a major challenge. We're asking you to tackle it and start to address it and set realistic targets for its reduction.

Steve Kerstetter:

To me, the acid test on welfare incomes is not how they relate to welfare incomes in other provinces, but whether they're livable or not. We've had no real indication over the years, looking at provincial programs across the country, of how provincial cabinets actually set rates. The rates are set, but there appears to be no apparent relationship to the cost of living.

So the challenge, the acid test is... If, for example, you have one child at home, try to live on a welfare income for even one month — \$1,400 a month. I can honestly tell you that I've never heard of anyone that has tried one of these experiments over the years that has talked afterwards about how generous welfare rates are. It's just not true.

The second issue I want to mention is low-wage jobs. Wages and salaries are a very important source of income for poor families with children. As of the last report card, 55.7 percent of all poor children in B.C. had at least one parent working full-time, full-year. A recent study for CCPA, the B.C. office, showed that there were 346,000 B.C. jobs that paid \$12 an hour or less in 2008. That's almost one of five employed workers in the province.

Most of the debate in recent years has been on a minimum wage of \$8.00 an hour, which First Call and others believe is very, very low. Our position is that we believe it's impossible to argue that in a traditionally poor province like Newfoundland and Labrador they can have a minimum wage of \$9.50 an hour, and yet if we did that in B.C., it would devastate the economy, destroy small businesses and wipe out thousands and thousands of jobs. We just don't think that's a credible argument. Just by the by, the minimum wage in Newfoundland and Labrador is going up to \$10 an hour as of July 1.

Dr. John Millar:

The issue of child and family poverty is causing people to be unnecessarily ill, and dying. I might not have said this so definitively ten years ago, but the evidence is now in. If you haven't seen the WHO Commission report on the social determinants of health, I would recommend it to you. It makes a very clear statement that the health inequities we see in our society are caused by — they're literally using those words "caused by" — the inequitable distribution of money, resources and power.

What we are seeing in British Columbia — and there's a full report on this that I can make available — is that people on low incomes have three, four, five times the prevalence of all the chronic diseases. Whether it be diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, mental health issues, you name it, they're all many, many times more prevalent. That's a direct causation issue. It does go a little bit the other way, granted. If you get sick, you're more likely to become poor. But most of it goes from poverty to poor health.

We are seeing a huge burden here of increasing prevalence of disease, which you all know is driving our health care system into the ground and is absorbing money out of every other ministry that can do things to improve the health and well-being of our society. So we have a major problem here, and the only way we are going to get at it is to do something about the underlying socioeconomic problem here, which is.... "Poverty" is an easy word, but it's not just income poverty. It's food poverty. It's housing poverty. It's lots of social isolation.

We have a major issue here where we are driving up health care costs. We are getting increasingly unwell. That's going to compromise our productivity and, therefore, our ability to compete economically and sustain economic growth, so it's a vicious downward cycle that we're in. It's costing us. The point here is that it is costing us a great deal not to take action to invest in a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

The complete transcript from the meeting is available [here](#).

The Victoria Times Colonist's Les Leyne wrote a [story](#) highlighting First Call's presentation:

Expectations rose so high so fast after a legislature committee agreed to hold a public meeting on poverty that the chair felt the need to dampen the anticipation.

Liberal MLA Joan McIntyre told participants at a day-long thinkfest last Friday that the session was just to foster awareness. [...]

Julie Norton said more money is part of the solution, but not the complete answer. [...] "It's a leadership perspective. It's creativity. It's working with people who are in poverty."

She said First Call wants a poverty plan that covers the entire province, includes targets and outcomes and provides for regular, systematic public reporting of any progress. [...]

Former chief medical health officer John Millar said three of the six provinces with identified poverty action plans have legislation that formally drives the efforts. He said they also have vision, strong leadership and often non-partisan and unanimous commitment. "They all have substantial funding, and they all have an accountability measure, often led by a minister or a ministerial committee."

At another meeting held this week, the committee chair Joan McIntyre reiterated that the purpose of the meeting on child poverty was simply to foster awareness, and that the committee's mandate does not include even issuing a report to the legislature about the meeting. They can, however, choose to highlight it in their annual report to the legislature. Some committee members expressed a desire that the committee take a stronger position on the issue.

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2. Right to Housing Legal Challenge Launched

A legal challenge has been launched in the Superior Court of Ontario on the basis that Canada and Ontario have violated the rights of the homeless by creating and maintaining conditions that lead to and sustain homelessness and inadequate housing. The challenge is supported by a coalition of housing and legal advocates. Read more about it in the [Globe and Mail](#).

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3. Calgary Pushes for National Poverty Plan

From the Calgary Herald:

Calgary aldermen are leading a push against poverty this weekend at a national conference of civic politicians.

The city's eight-member contingent to the annual meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in Toronto is the same size as the group that visited Whistler, B.C., for last year's convention.

This year, the Calgarians will ask delegates to endorse a resolution that urges Ottawa to develop anti-poverty legislation and commit "sufficient federal investment in social security for all Canadians."

The efforts stem from a national advocacy campaign called Dignity for All, which urges an end to poverty by 2020.

The campaign began last year, two decades after the House of Commons committed to erasing child poverty by 2000.

"The federal government needs to hear that a portion of its citizens live in undesirable daily living situations that need to be changed, and can be changed," said Ald. Joe Ceci, whose six-year stint as FCM board member ends with his council retirement this fall.

[Read more.](#)

In 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council called on Canada to develop a national strategy to eliminate poverty. In Canada's response, government stated:

Provinces and territories have jurisdiction in this area of social policy and have developed their own programs to address poverty. For example, four provinces have implemented poverty reduction strategies. The Government of Canada supports these measures, notably through benefits targeting children and seniors. These efforts are having a positive impact: low-income rates for seniors, women, and children have fallen considerably in the past decade.

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4. Sign on in Support of Children and Nonviolence Initiative

Raffi's Centre for Child Honouring has launched a new campaign against violence, providing a focal point for faith leaders to express their commitment to honouring the dignity of children:

We believe the times provide an opportunity for a new religious moment, in which the public and the world's spiritual leaders act in concert in honour of the world's young. This could profoundly impact human behaviour for generations.

We invite all citizens to sign the PLEA TO FAITH LEADERS and send it to their community faith leader and to the leader of your religion or faith tradition. The PLEA calls on faith leaders to sign a PROCLAMATION in a show of unity.

Sign the Plea or the Proclamation at www.childhonouring.org/plea. You can also download a PDF of the Plea to send to your faith leader.

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Research & Resources

1. Survey of Families Transitioning to Adult Services with CLBC

Does your family have a child reaching the age of 19 and accessing Community Living BC services? A resource parent with the Family Support Institute (FSI) is circulating a short questionnaire meant to "get a pulse" on the experiences of families in BC as CLBC looks at cost-savings through service redesign. Read the survey questions and find out how to respond [here](#).

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2. State of the Urban Youth

A State of the Urban Youth report was released at the UN's World Urban Youth Assembly and World Urban Forum held in Brazil in March:

The world today is younger than it has ever been, with half of the global population under the age of 25, and the majority of those living and growing up in cities and slums. This "youth bulge" defines one of the great challenges of the 21st century, this being how do governments at all levels overcome this urban divide, a divide where youth are finding themselves marginalized and excluded?

The State of the Urban Youth 2010-2011 report uniquely focuses on calling for the global community to level the playing field for urban youth. In this report UN-HABITAT focuses on youth exclusion from opportunities in urban areas, with the report imploring that now is the time to provide targeted programmes for urban youth so as to assure their equal access to opportunities. This report is based on a survey on youth opportunity and inequality given in four rapidly urbanizing cities: Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, Kingston, Nairobi and Lagos.

The findings of the survey suggest that young people have unequal access to basic services such as housing, education and employment, which leads to the youth not being able to have meaningful work or study.

Download the report [here](#).

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3. Best Chance Website for Families with Young Children

This website from the provincial government includes tools and resources for women, expectant parents and families with babies and toddlers up to the age of three. Resources include information on breastfeeding, how to write a birth plan, and general information on how to prepare for pregnancy, birth, and caring for a young child. Visit www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca.

4. Research on Teaching Children in their Mother Tongue

A paper by Jessica Ball at the University of Victoria emphasizes that a child can become fluent in English, even if it is not the language of instruction throughout primary school. It is both literacy and fluency in the mother tongue that lay cognitive and linguistic foundations for learning additional languages (via [ANCIE bulletin](#)). The paper states that UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in early childhood and primary education for over fifty years, yet most countries continue to offer schooling only in their official and dominant languages:

Decisions about which language(s) will be the medium of instruction and the treatment of children's home languages in preschools and schools exemplify the exercise of power, the manufacture of linguistic and eventually socio-economic marginalization and minoritization, and the unfulfilled promise of children's rights. Political, social, and technical considerations often collide in policy makers' decisions on language medium, schooling, and curriculum. Considerations include, but go beyond, questions of resources, teacher training, and subjects to be studied. Other crucial factors range from: the political will of local, regional, and national governments; the relationships between countries and their former colonizers; the understanding and patience of international donors; and parents' hopes and anxieties about which languages their children will need to secure employment and participate in their social, legal, and economic worlds.

The paper includes the following recommendations:

- *Recognize mother tongue acquisition, rather than acquisition of a dominant national or international language, as the first priority in assessing children's achievement in preschool and throughout primary school.*
- *Recruit early childhood educators and school teachers who are fluent in the mother tongue at the level of cognitive academic language proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking.*
- *Carry out awareness raising campaigns on the importance of the development and use of mother tongue-based instruction.*
- *Advocate for the critical role of governments in promoting effective mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education programs.*
- *Promote policies that position parents and other family members as 'first teachers' and that engage parents and community members in program planning, implementation, and evaluation.*

Download it [here](#).

Announcements

1. Vancouver Conference on Autism and Intellectual Disabilities

Interprofessional Continuing Education at UBC and Community Living BC present Health and Wellbeing in Children, Youth and Adults with Developmental Disabilities: Autism, Intellectual Disabilities and Other Neurodevelopmental Disorders, a two day conference at the Coast Plaza Hotel in Vancouver:

Children, youth and adults with Developmental Disabilities are vulnerable to high rates of general health and mental health concerns. These concerns significantly impact the affected individual's quality of life as well as their families, caregivers and the community. British Columbia has closed its institutions for individuals with DD, but the struggle to develop quality specialized services where appropriate, as well as ensuring access to generic health services continues. This conference will provide education and informative updates on psychiatric, behavioural and complex health components specific to individuals with DD, and showcase best practices in the field. Specifically, the conference will focus on approaches to complex challenging behaviours, contributing medical issues and new developments in medication and behavioral treatment. In addition, the conference will address important health issues including Reflux, Pain, Epilepsy, Dental Management and Sleep. Health problems in common genetic syndromes such as Down and Fragile X will also be addressed.

Download the full brochure and find out how to register [here](#).

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2. Summer Programs for Kids and Teenagers in Nanaimo

Nanaimo District Secondary Community School is offering a number of programs over the summer including Hospitality Jobs Training Week, July 5-9 for teenagers 15 and over. It includes training, exam, and certification in Cashier Training, WHMIS, and Foodsafe Level 1 to boost young people's skill certifications and resumes. Includes an overview of each industry, where the jobs are, and how to land them. Invest in yourself and have the rest of the summer to work in retail, hospitality, supermarket, or tourism industries!

Other programs on offer this summer include Flash Video Game Design with Sports Camp (ages 11-14); Basketball Camp (ages 6-13); Girls Volleyball Camp with VIU Mariners; and Nanaimo Wrestling Camp (ages 8-17, girls welcome!).

Find out more by calling 250.740.2026 or go to <http://schools.sd68.bc.ca/hfcs>.

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3. Fetal Alcohol Canadian Expertise Research Roundtable in Vancouver

The 11th FACE Research Roundtable will be held on Sept. 14th at the Plaza 500 Hotel in Vancouver. Full program information, registration form and call for poster abstracts are posted [here](#).

This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Susan Astley of the University of Washington. A leader in FASD research, Dr. Astley has developed the FASD 4-Digit Diagnostic Code, the 4-Digit Code Online Course, FAS Facial Photographic Analysis Software for diagnosis and screening of the FAS facial features, as well as a Foster Care FAS Screening Program.

FACE (Fetal Alcohol Canadian Expertise) was established in 2000 to promote open discussion and collaboration in all areas of medical and social science research related to the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy and lactation. Today the FACE Network includes researchers, clinicians, front-line workers, government and industry representatives, policy-makers and other stakeholders from across Canada.

Open to any who wish to attend, the FACE Research Roundtable is an important forum for anyone interested in medical and social science research on alcohol use during pregnancy. The FACE Research Network includes researchers, clinicians, front-line workers, government and industry representatives and policy-makers from across Canada. Please plan to attend and register early.

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4. Restorative Justice Training on the Impacts of Psychological Trauma

Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives, a leader in the field of Restorative Justice, is pleased to announce Transforming Trauma: Awakening Resilience in our Lives and Communities, a training opportunity for professionals and volunteers working with people impacted by psychological trauma.

Adapted from the internationally celebrated course Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resilience (STAR) at Eastern Mennonite University, this course will be offered June 21, 22 & 23, 2010 - 9:00am to 4:00pm at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (Richmond Campus).

This introductory course draws together the fields of neurobiology, psychology, restorative justice, conflict transformation and spirituality into a unique and practical framework for trauma healing.

In this course, participants will:

- Understand psychological trauma and its effects
- Learn new frameworks for breaking cycles of violence
- Gain confidence in trauma intervention
- Develop new and effective strategies for self-care

- Explore restorative justice as trauma healing

Course Instructor: Aaron Lyons, M.A with special Guest David L. Gustafson, M.A., R.C.C.

Registration Fee: \$460.00 (plus tax). Reduced rates available for groups of 4 or more.

To find out more, or to register, please contact Aaron Lyons at training@cjibc.org or 604-534-5515. Pre-registration is required.

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